

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
STATE OF MONTANA

BRIAN SCHWEITZER  
GOVERNOR



SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
EXHIBIT NO. 2  
DATE 1-12-07  
BILL NO. SB 152  
JOHN BOHLINGER  
LT. GOVERNOR

**TESTIMONY SB 152**

12 January 2007

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, my name is John Bohlinger and I am Montana's Lt. Governor. I stand before you today to offer the full support of the Governor and our Administration for Senate Bill 152.

This legislation, which has been introduced by the Chairman at the request of the Governor, will make a real difference in the lives of Montana school children. The education of Montana's youth is perhaps the single greatest responsibility of the State of Montana to our citizenry. It is through education that we create and instill a sense of civic duty and community. It is through education that we prepare

and develop our workforce for the jobs and economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. And it is through education that we provide opportunity and betterment for this and future generations. For these reasons education has been—and will continue to be—a top priority of Governor Schweitzer.

As you can see from the length of title, Senate Bill 152 is a package of policy proposals for improving public education in Montana. There are, however, common themes that bind these proposals together and provide the basis of the Governor's approach to public education in our State.

The first of these principles is education for life. From infancy to old age we learn. Learning is lifelong process that does not begin at age five and end upon becoming an adult. Recognizing this reality, Governor Schweitzer has led the

way for the Board of Education to improve, not only the individual components of our educational system, but how these components interact and work together. Just as a child begins by speaking a first word, then a few sentences, and then a story, we recognize that Montana's education system must be based on solid foundations and seamless transitions, as well.

The second principle of the policy proposals in Senate Bill 152 is based on the simple, yet irrefutable, fact that every Montana child is unique and special. We all have different dreams, goals, and aspirations. It is our duty to supply an education for all Montana children—regardless of race, gender, or socio-economic background—that provides the opportunity for each child to attain their individual dreams, goal, and aspirations. The values of equality and opportunity

are fundamental American values, and they are the underpinnings of our democracy.

These values are expressed in Senate Bill 152. Higher education must be affordable for all Montanans. This legislation improves the Governor's post-secondary scholarship program. Created just two years ago at the urging of Governor Schweitzer, this scholarship program more than doubled state funding for need-based financial aid to Montana college students. The program will provide even more scholarships in the coming two years. When coupled with the Governor's proposed freeze in college tuition for the first time in recent memory the cost of higher education in Montana will be going down, not up.

Another expression of these values can be found in the section of Senate Bill 152 that provides the best beginning with state funding for voluntary, full-time kindergarten. The human mind is an awe inspiring creation, and the early years of learning are absolutely vital.

In the fall of 2005, I had the opportunity to attend a National Lieutenant Governor's conference in Ashville, North Carolina. The conference was sponsored by Jim Hunt a man who served four terms as the Governor of North Carolina. Governor Hunt is a passionate man. And above all he is passionate about education.

Thirty-five years ago North Carolina was considered a backwater state. In the 1980's, under the leadership of Governor Hunt, North Carolina began investing in education

at all levels, including early childhood. Today, North Carolina has one of the nation's most educated workforces and dynamic economies.

I asked Governor Hunt how he moved North Carolina forward in such a dramatic way. And his answer was simple. "John, our children are our future. And we invested in the future at earliest opportunity. It just made sense."

The Governor and I are asking you, the elected leaders of our State, to make the same investment in Montana's future with your support of Senate Bill 152. Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today. The Governor and I are proud of the historic investments the State of Montana has made in education in the past two years. Senate Bill 152 is a

continuation of our efforts to provide an accessible, quality,  
and life-long education system for all Montanans.